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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [ECON](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: GVN AVOIDS HARSH CRITICISM OF 2005 HUMAN
RIGHTS REPORT

Ref: Hanoi 670

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¶1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Unlike in previous years, the GVN has not launched an intensive media campaign against the 2005 Human Rights Report. This could reflect a decision to avoid possible repercussions with the U.S. Congress that would complicate a PNTR vote on WTO membership. It may also be a result of a more positive approach to human rights in the country. Two leading dailies did, however, publish commentaries that asserted that the report was based on "distorted and unilateral information that failed to reflect the reality in Vietnam." The national Voice of Vietnam Radio and Vietnam Television merely repeated formal remarks made by the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson, who said differences between the two countries "resulted in different views and approaches towards human rights." Unlike last year, the Embassy has not been called in to receive a formal protest. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) An editorial entitled "Distorted and Groundless Statements" published in Nhan Dan ("People") Newspaper asserted that the report released on March 8 is just a rehash of old material, containing "impudent slander that already existed in the previous reports" and faulted the drafters for ignoring the reality in Vietnam. The newspaper claimed that the Communist Party and the State always respect the political rights of its citizens and seeks to create favorable conditions for them to express their points of view and practice their religions. The piece also quoted former U.S. Ambassador Pete Peterson as saying that, in comparison with ten years ago, "Vietnam has obviously made important progress year by year."

¶3. (SBU) An editorial entitled "Inept Echoes" published in Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People's Army) Newspaper said that the 2005 Report has "failed to overcome prejudices in its assessment of the human rights situation in the country." It went on to say that the 2005 report "only reflects the viewpoint of factions that take advantage of sensitive issues, such as democracy, human rights and freedom of belief and religion, to interfere with internal issues of other countries." It said that the report represented the prejudiced views of a minority of people unable to overcome the past and intent on hindering the stabilization process of U.S.-Vietnam relations.

¶4. (SBU) Voice of Vietnam radio and Vietnam Television

both covered a formal announcement made by Vietnamese Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Le Dzung, in which he claimed that differences in political systems, levels of development, histories and cultures between nations result in different views and approaches towards human rights. He also said it is unacceptable "for one country to impose its views and approaches on other countries." Similar comments were echoed by other leading newspapers, including Thanh Nien, Tuoi Tre and Lao Dong, on their online webpages. Unlike last year, the MFA has not called in the Embassy for a formal protest. In fact, during an extensive discussion on human rights between the Ambassador and VFM Le Van Bang (reftel) March 21, the subject of the Human Rights Report did not come up.

¶5. (SBU) Professor Ngo Van Hoa of the Vietnam's Institute of History confirmed that this year the GVN did not launch a major media campaign against the report. By contrast, between 2000 and 2004, State-controlled media ran a series of commentaries, editorials and interviews with individual citizens and leaders of quasi-Governmental mass organizations condemning comments in those year's reports. He said that overall reactions to this year's report were much milder, and apparently made "for form's sake only." He surmised that the GVN does not want to risk a backlash from the U.S. Congress that may hinder Vietnam's WTO bid or a vote on Permanent Normal Trade status for the country.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Professor Hoa is probably correct that the GVN is concerned that too strong a reaction to this year's report might draw attention to its human rights record at a time when it is seeking to enter the WTO and, at the same time, be removed from the list of Countries of Particular Concern for religious freedom

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violations. This may also reflect the continuation of a more positive approach to human rights issues generally. The GVN has taken pains to address a number of international human rights concerns in the past year, such as by reducing the number of prisoners of concern to just a handful, working to implement a new framework on religion and engaging us in a bilateral dialogue on human rights. End Comment.

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